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Ex-CIA Officer Claims Evidence Was Withheld in Korea Scandal

By Allan Frank
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A former CIA operations officer has accused the agency of shielding from the Justice Department evidence about alleged illegal payments by South Korean government officials to members of the U.S. Congress.

The former officer, Christian Philip Liechty, says he reported the information about the alleged payments to higher officials in the agency beginning in 1974.

Liechty, 39, who worked for the CIA in South Korea from 1969 to 1973, was fired from the agency last year. He contends he was fired for pressing his complaint that CIA officials deliberately withheld information on the payoffs from Justice Department and congressional investigators.

Liechty said he complained to various agency officials, including the CIA deputy director for East Asia operations, an official from the agency's inspector-general's office and finally, last year, to CIA Director Stansfield Turner.

News in 1976 of payments allegedly authorized by then-South Korean President Park Chung Hee triggered several investigations of what became known as "Koreagate."

U.S. intelligence agencies supplied information about some South Korean activities to Justice Department prosecutors and House ethics committee investigators but much of it — particularly about payments to four congressmen — was never released.

Some information Liechty has accused the CIA of withholding related

to activities of South Korean rice dealer Tongsun Park, who was accused of giving gifts and cash payments to several congressmen.

Liechty said the CIA withheld or downplayed some damaging evidence about illegal South Korean activities in the United States in order to support "predetermined foreign policy objectives" of President Richard Nixon and his foreign affairs adviser, Henry Kissinger.

Citing "national security" grounds, U.S. District Judge Oren R. Lewis of Alexandria, Va., last Friday issued a gag order in a harassment case filed by Liechty against his former CIA superior.

Liechty declined to talk about any of the issues in the court case, but acknowledged yesterday that he filed several complaints with CIA superiors about various forms of payoffs that he believed were given to American public officials by Korean agents.

He also reported that the South Koreans had gained significant access to at least one high-ranking member of the U.S. House leadership.

Lewis granted the gag order and sealed some of the papers in the case at the request of Justice Department attorneys.

Liechty filed the harassment suit, which the judge sometimes referred to as a libel suit, against Robert F. Bodroghy, who was one of Liechty's CIA superiors in South Korea while Liechty served there from September 1969 through June 1973.

Liechty, of Bethesda, filed the suit as an offshoot of a dispute he is having with his estranged wife about custody of their 8-year-old daughter.